**“‘The strange and the foreign is not interesting--only the deeply personal and familiar.’” - Lee speaking to Samuel Hamilton in John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* (1952)**

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**Text**

*The Red Pony*

**Level**

10th Grade English

**Objectives**

* + Improve critical thinking skills, writing skills and foster an appreciation for reflection
  + Help students understand that a particular piece of literature consists of a series of intentional choices made by a writer and how those choices speak to the reader

**Goals**

* + Students will analyze the significance of experience, place and relationships in “The Gift” and in their own lives.
  + Students will develop their capacity to recognize effective instances of language use as well as specific uses of figurative language.
  + Students will sharpen their own ability to select effective instances of language and invent unique figurative language and apply it to their own life experiences.
  + Students will be introduced to the idea of self reflection, observation and expression of one’s sense of identity.
  + Through performance, students will gain a deeper understanding of the story.

**Title**

Story as Window and Mirror

**Overview**

This lesson serves as an introductory activity to a subsequent multi-genre unit centered around the theme of “Identity” in which each student will have to represent who they are through a variety of genres, from visual art, informational text to published poetry and an autobiographical essay, etc.

Before I ask them to do this for themselves we will read “The Gift,” the first chapter of *The Red Pony,* and see how Jody’s experiences in the story, relationships to those around him and to the place where he lives might help to shape who he might ultimately become.

**Procedures**

A. In small groups students will create a chart of Jody’s individual experiences, his relationships, and the important instances of place in the story. The responses will be recorded on the accompanying [handout](http://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3FENjPPcUIdTGhFRm5oUnpqU0k).

B. Following this students will discuss the possible effects of those experiences on Jody’s sense of identity and list the results of their discussion on the accompanying [handout](http://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3FENjPPcUIdTGhFRm5oUnpqU0k).

Example: Drinking water from the spring might have the effect of creating a closer connection to the land.

Example: Billy’s inability to save the colt might have the effect of teaching Jody that everyone is fallible.

Example:The coldness of Jody’s father, Mr. Tiflin, might cause Jody to seek out other father figures.

Example: The graphic nature of the end of the novel juxtaposed with the earlier expectation of happiness,

companionship and pride might reflect the indifference of nature or the immutability of death.

C. On the accompanying [handout](http://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3FENjPPcUIdTGhFRm5oUnpqU0k), each student will also complete a personal chart like the one they created for Jody that will include a list of experiences, relationships and place(s) that have helped shape who they have become or are becoming.

D. Students will then go back into their small groups and identify a short scene that illustrates an experience, the nature of a relationship for Jody or the significance of a place in the chapter. It should not be more than a page long. They will have a class period to prepare a performance of this scene for the class. Each group will select one of the three [performance strategies](http://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3FENjPPcUIdalh6eXlDbnlTaVk) and use it as the basis for their short performance.

E. After the scenes are performed they should write a brief reflection from the perspective of Jody that discusses the significance of the particular scene on his sense of identity.

F. Students will then use their reflection, group T-Chart centered around Jody and their copy of the story to write an “I Am” poem from the perspective of Jody.

* + Students must utilize adjectives, adverbs and verbs from Steinbeck’s prose in every other line.
  + Students must also use two instances of Steinbeck’s figurative language (metaphor, simile or imagery) in their poem as well.
  + It should be a minimum of one page long.

Example: I am “silver gray and black like a negative”

I am the son of a brutal father who “vomited a putrefied stream” of criticism

I look up to Billy Buck

“calm and fearless and fierce”

I lie in arms of the Gabilans…

This will be due the following day. At that time students will share some of the choices Steinbeck made in his story that they appropriated for their “Jody” poems and they will be listed on the board and left there for students to emulate as they begin drafting their own “I Am” poems.

Before beginning the drafting process I share my own personal “I Am” poem and I also show them an example of a spoken word artist performing an “I Am” poem.

Example: “I am - Kinyo”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=all3NMwg7uY>

G. Students will then consult the chart they made for themselves and they will write an “I Am” poem based on the experiences, relationships and places in their lives.

* + This poem is modeled on the one they created from Jody’s perspective and utilize a comparable number of vivid verbs, adjectives and adverbs and incorporate four instances of figurative language

Example: I am the son of carpenter

I am the son of a mother who raised me up

I am brother, son, friend and enemy

I am the joker

I am the thorn in my sister’s side

Six feet of topsoil nourishes my spirit

like a bat in the dark tree tops

**Word to the wise**

In my experience students have great difficulty seeing their own experiences, relationships and places in an artistic context. I provide a written copy of my own “I Am” poem and perform it for them. Afterwards I make the connection between my use of figurative language and the *spirit* of my story rather than a list of the *facts* of my story.

**Sources**

Steinbeck, John. The Red Pony. Penguin Books: New York, 1933.

Spangler, Matt. “Adaptation Strategies for Using Live Performances to Explore

Narrative Fiction.” Steinbeck Institute presentation, 2013.

“I Am -- Kinyo” *youtube* video